

Tramadol ban: all you need to know

From 1 March 2019, in-competition use of tramadol will be banned across all disciplines. This new regulation, which is being introduced for medical reasons, allows for penalties to be imposed if the rules are broken.

What is tramadol?

Tramadol is a painkiller in the synthetic opioid category. It is frequently used by cyclists, as shown by the findings of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)'s monitoring programme since 2012. In particular in the 2017 survey:

- 4.4% of in-competition tests on cyclists showed the use of tramadol;
- 68% of urine samples – taken from across 35 Olympic sports – containing tramadol were from cyclists.

What are the side effects of Tramadol?

The use of tramadol can have two types of side-effect: nausea, drowsiness and loss of concentration (increasing the risk of race crashes), and gradual dependence on the substance with a risk of developing an addiction.

Tramadol is available on prescription, but is also freely available on the internet, which increases the risk of uncontrolled self-medication.

In light of the risks associated with its use in competitive cycling, and in accordance with the UCI Management Committee decision of June 2018, the UCI Medical Regulations will ban in-competition use of tramadol. The regulations will be published on the UCI website shortly.

What is the purpose of the ban?

The ban is based on a desire to reduce the risk of crashes, and that of drug dependency, among riders.

The new regulation will come into force on 1 March 2019. Any rider taking part in an event registered on a national or international calendar may be chosen to provide a blood sample as a test for tramadol.

Testing will take place in-competition, after races, across all disciplines and categories.

This will be managed by the UCI's Medical Director, with logistical and personnel support from the Cycling Anti-Doping Foundation (CADF).

What method will be used?

Dried blood droplets will be tested for presence of Tramadol, using a high-precision analysis technique. Positive or negative results will depend on the presence or absence of the substance in the blood (there is no threshold). The analysis will be carried out in a reference laboratory, with the results sent to the UCI Medical Director within a maximum of 4-5 days.

What are the penalties?

Rider penalties

- A first offence committed by a rider will be penalised with disqualification from the event, alongside all resulting consequences (loss of medals, points and prize money). In addition, a fine of CHF5,000 will be imposed if the rider is a member of a UCI-registered team. In all other cases, the fine will be CHF1,000.
- A second offence will result in disqualification from the event and a five-month suspension. If a further offence is committed, a nine-month suspension will be incurred.

Team penalties

If two riders belonging to the same UCI-registered team commit an offence within a period of 12 months, the team will be fined CHF10,000. If a further offence is committed within the same 12-month period, the team will be suspended for a period of between 1 and 12 months, to be determined by the UCI Disciplinary Commission.